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READING: A FAMILY AFFAIR FREE FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES

Patricia Donnelly, executive director of the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia, was tired of the same old silent auction, dinner style fundraiser as a way to introduce the community to an organization and its work. “It typically excluded the people we work with most,” she said. “I wanted to bring the private sector, public sector and non-profit sector together to provide free, fun, educational activities to those who need them,” she said.

Donnelly came up with the idea for a family literacy day. “I brought together a group of stakeholders to take my idea and create a stronger vision,” she said. Those stakeholders were librarians from Fairfax and Arlington County Public Libraries, WETA, and Literacy Council volunteers who also were parents. They created Reading: A Family Affair (RAFA).

On March 19, 2011, the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia will present its fifth annual Reading: A Family Affair from 9:30 to 3 at the James Lee Community Center in Falls Church. Kids of all ages can participate in a wide array of events and performances. Each child will also choose a free book to take home.

“There are many families in the region who still have not heard about the Literacy Council’s programs,” said Donnelly. “RAFA is a great way to get the word out to potential volunteers, adults who need our services, and businesses and individuals looking for a great

mission to support,” she said. “RAFA also provides an opportunity for us to introduce kids and their parents to the terrific literacy activities available throughout the community,” she said.

The day’s activities will include: Photographs with WETA’s Clifford, The Big Red Dog; storytelling by Diane Macklin, Lulu Delacre, and Mary Quattlebaum; performances by Sing Books with Emily, The Rainbow Entertainment Company Reader’s Theater, Bob Brown Puppets, Kalavaridhi Dance Company and Fraternidad Dance Company; presentations by Tom Angleberger, author of *The Strange Case of Origami Yoda*; reading and writing activities with PBS Kids and Thinkfinity; and book giveaways.

“Every year we pay attention to the audience and listen to their comments,” said Donnelly. “So every year we add something new or change up the performers.” Events are divided between rooms with the names Hear a Book; Become a Book; Read & Write a Book; Click a Book; and Verizon’s See a Book. “Verizon has generously continued to be our signature sponsor since the beginning,” said Donnelly.

Since its inception, RAFA has grown from just under 350 visitors to over 700. “For RAFA’s fifth anniversary, we’d love to see more than 1,000 people in the James Lee Community Center enjoying all the ways to present stories and bring books to life,” said Donnelly. “We want to demonstrate to families that literacy activities extend beyond the classroom,” she said.

A complete schedule of Reading: A Family Affair activities is available at <http://www.lcnv.org/>. James Lee Community Center is located at 2855 Annandale Rd., Falls Church, Virginia 22042.

The mission of LCNV is to teach adults the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and understanding English in order to empower them to participate more fully and confidently in their communities.

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